



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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SEA OTTERS PRESENTED TO WASHINGTON ZOO

A new attempt to keep sea otters alive in captivity is being made by the Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service. All previous attempts have failed.

The Service presented three of these strange-looking "little old men of the sea" to the National Zoological Park, Washington, D. C., in a ceremony at the Park on June 14.

The otters come from the Aleutian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, 5,800 miles away, where the Fish and Wildlife Service has been protecting and studying the unusual species for many years. The three animals were trapped on the rocky shore of Amchitka Island and transported by Navy boat to Seattle where they arrived on June 1. They were kept at the Woodland Park Zoo, Seattle, until plans for shipping to Washington could be completed.

Because sea otters cannot survive in temperatures over 50 degrees Fahrenheit, arrangements were made with Northwest Airlines for a specially cooled stratoscruiser to fly the 3 animals from Seattle to Washington. A low temperature air-conditioner has also been installed at the Washington zoo's small mammal house, where the otter will be kept.

The otters were accompanied from Seattle by Ford Wilke, a wildlife research biologist for the Service. One of Wilke's chief problems was to procure suitable food for the animals, as evidenced by his prearrival telegram which read in part:-- "Request zoo to bring fresh fish, few small crabs, and ice to airport." The average otter eats one-third its own weight, or about 25 pounds, a day.

The sea otter is about 4 feet long from the tip of its blunt nose to the end of its narrow, flattened tail. It has long, buff-colored whiskers and its elongated body is as shapeless as a rubber bag half full of water. The otter's front feet resemble a dog's paws with mittens on, and its webbed hind feet are shaped like a man's hand. The animal is better adapted to swimming than walking, but can do both.

Sea otters, whose thick fur brought fabulous prices, were once abundant along the Pacific Coast from southern California to northern Alaska. Intense hunting, however, reduced the species to commercial extinction and the taking of these animals, except by special permit, has been banned by Federal law since 1910.

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